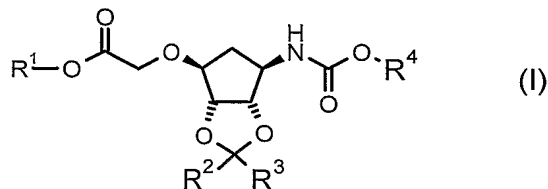
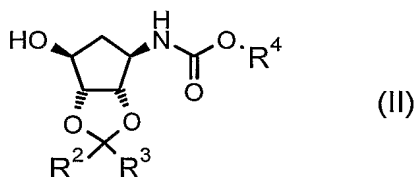


CLAIMS

1. A process for the preparation of a compound of formula (I):



- 5 wherein R^1 is C_{1-6} alkyl; R^2 and R^3 are, independently, C_{1-6} alkyl; and R^4 is C_{1-6} alkyl or benzyl (wherein the phenyl ring of benzyl is optionally substituted by nitro, $S(O)_2(C_{1-4}$ alkyl), cyano, C_{1-4} alkyl, C_{1-4} alkoxy, $C(O)(C_{1-4}$ alkyl), $N(C_{1-6}$ alkyl) $_2$, CF_3 or OCF_3); the process comprising reacting a compound of formula (II):



- 10 wherein R^2 , R^3 and R^4 are as defined above, with a suitable base; and reacting the product so formed with $R^1OC(O)CH_2X$, wherein R^1 is as defined above and X is chloro, bromo or iodo; wherein the process is carried out in a suitable solvent at a temperature in the range $-40^\circ C$ to $-5^\circ C$; and wherein at least 0.2 moles of the compound of formula (II) are used in the process.
- 15 2. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein R^1 , R^2 and R^3 are independently selected from C_{1-4} alkyl.
3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or 2 wherein R^1 is ethyl.
4. A process as claimed in claim 1, 2 or 3 wherein R^2 and R^3 are methyl.
5. A process as claimed in claim 1, 2, 3 or 4 wherein R^4 is benzyl optionally substituted by C_{1-4} alkyl.
- 20 6. A process as claimed in claim 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 wherein R^4 is unsubstituted benzyl.
7. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein X is bromo.
8. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7 wherein the base is an alkyl metal C_{1-6} alkoxide.
- 25 9. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8 wherein the base is potassium tert-butoxide.

10. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: $R^1O_2CCH_2X$: compound of formula (II) is (1 to 1.3):(1 to 1.3):1.

11. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: $R^1O_2CCH_2X$: compound of formula (II) is (1.1 to 1.3):(1.1 to 1.3):1.

5 12. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 11 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: $R^1O_2CCH_2X$: compound of formula (II) is 1.2:1.2:1.

13. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12 wherein the solvent is selected from a cyclic ether, an aliphatic ethers and an aromatic solvent.

10 14. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13 wherein the solvent is selected from tetrahydrofuran, diethyl ether, diisopropyl ether, methyl tert-butyl ether, benzene, toluene and xylene; and a mixture of two or more of said solvents.

15. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 14 wherein the solvent is tetrahydrofuran.

15 16. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 15 wherein the temperature is in the range -30°C to -10°C .

17. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 16 wherein the temperature is in the range -25°C to -15°C .

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